

Gathering With Christ

Hebrews 10:24-25

Last Sunday, Steve LeBar gave an excellent presentation highlighting the results of the recent ministry mapping survey conducted for the purpose of seeing where the church is at to help in guiding the selection of the next pastor. From reading the condensed report, and watching the video of his presentation, it became clear that there is some uncertainty about the mission of the church. By the way, I sent out an email earlier this week with the link to the YouTube video. If you didn't stay for the presentation, I would strongly recommend that you take half an hour to watch it. If you did attend, I would recommend you watch it again. As I said in my email, it is both informative and encouraging as it highlights the overall health of the church. There are some opportunities for us to invest in for future growth as a church that we will begin to address.

Pre-COVID, the Strategic Planning Team reviewed the purpose and mission of the church. We made some slight changes to our purpose and mission which were then presented to the church. For clarity and understanding of what we are about as a church, I am going to take the next four Sundays to review our mission statement. They provide a roadmap for us to understand why exist as a church, what our purpose is, our aim, for this church located at 2500 Hartland Rd., Hartland, Michigan.

Purpose: Fellowship Bible Church is organized specifically for the God-honoring purpose of the edification of believers from God's Holy Word, the Bible, the evangelism of non-believers through the Gospel of God's saving grace, and the fellowship of its members through worship, preaching/teaching, and Christ-centered activities.

Our mission statement is then a brief but succinct strategy as to how we are going to accomplish our purpose. By the way, you see this every week.

Mission Statement: Gathering with Christ, Growing in Christ, Going for Christ, Giving to Christ.

We will consider each of them separately. Today we

will look at what it means to gather with Christ.

Eventually we will get to **Hebrews 10:24-25**, but first I want to begin in the opening book of the Bible. Turn with me please in your Bible to **Genesis 1**. In the opening chapter we have the record of God's creative act bringing everything into existence by His spoken word. Repeatedly we see these words **"And God said...and it was so."** In other words, He said what He was going to do and then did it just as He said.

There are some other important words following each creative act. After it was completed God said, **"it is GOOD"**. And after the sixth and last day of His creative acts He looked at it all and said **"it was VERY GOOD."** It was also on the sixth day that He created two people, male and female. That it was very good means He wouldn't have done anything differently, nor could He improve on anything He created.

Now when we come to **chapter 2**, we zoom in on God's creative actions from **chapter 1**. If you remember the days of old fold up maps you had in your glovebox, you will recall that on one side was a map of the state and on the other side were blow up sections of individual cities. That's what we have here. **Chapter 1** is like the state map and **chapter 2** is like the blow up of the city which in this case is specifically the creation of man. This isn't the account of a second creation. God zooms in on man.

Now, remember from **chapter 1** that everything God created was VERY GOOD. But in **chapter 2** we see what might be considered the first negative words of the Bible. On the sixth day after He created man, God told him to name all the animals. God could have done that. He could have made up some flash cards and held them up for Adam to see a picture of an elephant with the word elephant underneath. Instead, God gave that task to Adam. There's a pair of monkeys. There's a pair of horses. There's a pair of aardvarks. Would you look at that? That must be a hippopotamus.

After he was done naming the animals, **verse 20** says there was no suitable helper for him. It was evident to Adam that he wasn't a pair, that he was alone. How many of you would agree this wasn't an oversight on God's part? I think it was to show Adam that he was incomplete, that he needed someone like himself. And God said **"it is not good for man to be alone."** So God put him to sleep and created woman. In that single act, God created companionship.

Adam woke up from his divine surgical nap and said "Wow, man. She is like me and from me but different" and we read in **verse 24** that they became one flesh.

Now, fast forward about 4,000 years. Jesus is fully engaged in His ministry, and He tells the disciples that He will build His church and the gates of hell will not be able to stand against it. We all know that He wasn't talking about a physical building. The word translated church means assembly or called out ones. The church is comprised of people who have placed faith in Christ as Savior and upon their faith have been united into a body of believers who are collectively in Christ, joined by the Holy Spirit.

When someone asks you what church you attend, invariably you answer by telling them the name of the church and it's physical location.

I'm part of Fellowship Bible Church located at 2500 Hartland Rd., in Hartland, MI. The better answer is to say that I belong to church that is in Christ.

Ephesians 1:22–23 "And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way." The church isn't the building but its people.

There are two ways to look at the church, which is referred to as the body of Christ. It can be referred to as the universal church or the local church. The universal church is made up of every believer from the Day of Pentecost when the church was born and includes every nation, tribe, and tongue in every era until Christ returns.

I Corinthians 12:13 "For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or

Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink."

Adam and Eve became one physically, the church became one spiritually through the work of the Holy Spirit bringing all believers into a spiritual body.

But the body of Christ is also made up of local gatherings of which we are just one of thousands and thousands around the world. Every believer should be part of a local church, a body of believers gathering for the common purpose of glorifying God and the good of each other.

I grew up in an area with lots of Mennonite and Amish folks. We went to Shipshewana last week. One day we toured the Menno-Hof Museum, which tells the history of the Mennonite and Amish people. My great-great-greats were Mennonite so I was interested in learning some of the history and learned something I didn't know. **How many of you know I don't know everything?** The Amish don't have church buildings. Instead of a centralized place to meet for their service, they go to different homes. The church isn't a building but the people.

Now, let's turn our attention to **Hebrews 10**. The first 18 verses speak about the one-time sacrifice of Jesus and how it is superior to the animal sacrifices of the Old Testament which **verse 1** says were just a picture of the one-time sacrifice of Christ. Because of His sacrifice, **verse 19** gives us something very important to know. When Christ died on the cross, what monumental thing happened in the Temple? The curtain tore from top to bottom. Beginning with the Tabernacle that was built while the Israelites wandered around the wilderness to when the Temple was erected under King Solomon, rebuilt by Ezra and then by King Herod, only the High Priest could enter the place called the Holy of Holies where the Ark of the Covenant was located. And then it was only once a year when the blood of the animal sacrifice was sprinkled on the Ark to atone for sin, again, just a picture of what was to come. But when Christ came and the curtain was torn separating the Holy place from the Holy of Holies, all that changed. Because of faith in Christ, we are now considered as priests giving us direct access

into the presence of God. Look at **verses 19-22**.
This is important to see as we come to **vs. 24-25**.

Because of Jesus' shed blood, **"let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of our faith."** The covering of Christ's blood over the believer is the key that unlocks direct access to God. Having a sincere heart simply means we have an undivided allegiance within our heart. A full assurance of faith refers to trusting and following Jesus without any hesitation. Think of **Prov. 3:5-6**.

Noodle that for a minute and look at **verse 23**. **"Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for He who promised is faithful."**

Unswervingly means no doubting, 100% assurance of what you believe. We can have such hope or faith because God proves faithful in all His promises.

Now, let's read **verses 24-25**.

Let me put **verses 22 and 23** together as a tie in to **verses 24-25**.

The relationship we have vertically with God has a direct bearing on our horizontal relationships with others. When I do pre-marital counseling I tell them that the relationship they have with God determines the relationship they will have with their spouse. They go hand in hand. If we aren't in a right relationship with God, we won't be in a right relationship with our spouse. The closer we draw near to God, the better we will be in putting into action what **verses 24-25** tell us to do regarding one another.

Let us draw near to God.

Let us hold on unswervingly to the hope we have.

Let us consider one another.

They're each tied together.

When it comes to gathering with Christ, here's point number one: our consideration of one another.

I. OUR CONSIDERATION OF ONE ANOTHER – v. 24

Notice that two letter word **"us"**. It's plural so it speaks of our connectedness or oneness, the arm in arm, lock step of how we are all in this together.

The author says that we are supposed to consider one another. The dictionary defines the word consider as giving careful attention or thought to someone or something, especially with regard to taking some action.

The same idea is seen in **Philippians 2:3-4** **"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than ourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others."** Essentially, stop, think about others and give attention to them.

We can get so caught up in our own world and what's happening to us that we forget or neglect to see others. Our problems and worries and work make them invisible and both Paul and the author of Hebrews tell us to stop and pay careful attention to others.

The author gives us two things about which that we are to consider related to one another. We'll come to those in a moment. Before we do, there is one more word the author gives in our consideration of one another. It's the word provoke. If you are like me, you automatically think of someone that is irritating, who says or does something intentionally to you that riles you, makes you annoyed or angry.

If you had siblings riding in the family car you may remember drawing that imaginary line in the middle so that the other sibling couldn't cross. Just to irritate you, we call it knowing which buttons to push, they would stick a finger or a hand over the line just to get you riled up. You would holler up to the front "Mom, Johnny's crossing the line."

That's the negative side of the meaning of provoke and not what the author had in mind in **Hebrews 10**. He's not telling us to use our spurs to dig into the side of someone to get them moving or irritate them. The author uses the word in a positive way here. It can also mean to spur someone on, motivate or stimulate them to do something that is good.

Paul did that with Timothy in **I Timothy 1:6** when he motivated his young friend to fan into flame the

gift God had given him.

When we give careful attention to others, how are we supposed to motivate them, how do we urge them on? Our verse gives us two primary ways in our race of faith: in our attitudes and in our actions. The first way is to consider one another in our attitudes.

A. Consider One Another In Our Attitudes

Notice again **verse 24: “And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love.”** That’s our attitude. Now love can also be an action, but I believe that the action of love is the result of the attitude of love. In His teaching, Jesus said that what’s in the heart, our attitude, will come out in what we say and do. Attitudes begets actions.

We could spend a long time just on how we are to love one another and if you remember from several weeks ago, we looked at the love of Jesus and how we are to emulate that. It was both something Jesus taught and how He lived.

John 13:34-35 “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another.”

I John 3:18 “Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.”

I John 4:7-12, 16b-21

The attitude of love in our heart is evident in how we treat others as we see from **I Corinthians 13:4-7** which describes other attitudes and actions that are evident when we demonstrate this kind of love. It’s a good measuring stick that really shows the degree and depth of our attitude of love. We are to spur each other to love one another. If we harbor resentment, anger, bitterness, or unforgiveness toward someone else, then we are not exhibiting the love we say we have. John essentially says that if we don’t love others, then we really don’t love God. We are to motivate each other in our attitude of love toward one another. Love is the foundational attitude that feeds each of the other attitudes like

being patient, not being envious or proud, or rude or easily angered. Love breeds trust and hope and leads us to the second motivation that we are to consider. It has to do with our actions.

B. Consider One Another In Our Actions

verse 24: “And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward...good works.”

Paul tells us in **I Corinthians 15** that in light of the resurrection and the subsequent victory we have as believers over death and sin, because Christ rose from the dead, we are to stand firm not allowing anything to move us, giving ourselves fully to the work of the Lord (**verse 58**).

How many know that Christian service isn’t just for pastors and missionaries? Service is for everyone in the body of Christ. And so the author says that each believer is to motivate other believers to get in the game, to be actively involved in some form of service or ministry, to do good deeds. **How many of you know that God has already prepared good works for you to do?**

Ephesians 2:10 “For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

A couple chapters later he adds that various church leaders are gifted to the church in order to help believers mature **“to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up and bring about unity in the church until we reach the full measure of Christ.”** (**Ephesians 4:12-13**)

How are we doing at spurring one another in attitudes and actions?

Our act of considering one another is to help each other grow spiritually and show the importance of church community.

The second thing I see from our text as it relates to our gathering with Christ is about our companionship with one another.

II. OUR COMPANIONSHIP WITH ONE ANOTHER – v. 25a

Here's a graph from last week that Steve LeBar shared. It indicates that over 90% of our congregation attend every week. Honestly ask yourself where you fall on the graph.

Do you attend once in a blue moon?

Once a month?

Twice a month?

Three times a month?

Every week?

The author tells us not to give up meeting together. The KJV, I think, uses a stronger word when it tells us not to forsake meeting together. The word means to abandon or to give up on or leave hanging. For some unstated reason, some believers stopped going to church.

Sister Sally said something you didn't like.

Brother Johnson snubbed you.

You thought the preacher said something in the sermon about you.

You don't like the style of the service.

Your kid was hurt by the deacon's kid.

There are any number of reasons people stop going to church and the author says, don't be like that.

You need to attend.

When I was serving as Hospice chaplain, I met folks who told me they were Christians but didn't attend church and didn't need to. They said they could get what they wanted by reading their Bible or listening to some preacher on TV. In some respects, COVID did us a great service. It pushed many churches, us included, to come up with ways to keep church going, so thank you Johnathan for getting us online and streaming each week. It continues to serve people who can't be here for health reasons. It also reaches people we wouldn't otherwise reach who have watched our services from different parts of the world. For example, Bezawit watches when she is able all the way from Ethiopia. Robyn's niece has watched. I couldn't tell you all the people who have watched and benefited.

But while it provides a beneficial service, it also can be a disservice. It can become convenient to stay home. Church attendance isn't a matter of convenience, it must be a matter of conviction and

commitment.

Now, let me tell you why gathering together regularly is so important.

A. There Is Companionship Through Support

Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 "Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: if one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!"

How many of you know that Robyn loves to garden? Every year she puts in around 40 tomato plants. There's beef steak with tomatoes that are as big or bigger than softballs. She plants heirlooms that are about the size of softballs. The Romas can be as big as a billiard ball. And of course, there are a couple varieties of cherry tomatoes. Some of those plants grow to be about 4' tall and they go wild producing bushels of tomatoes. They get so big and heavy from all the tomatoes that we have to put cages around them. The cages provide support to the plants to keep them standing up. But we didn't get the cage in deep enough on one Roma plant and it still fell over.

How many of you have ever been discouraged, hurt, sick, emotionally, spiritually, or physically drained?

Every one of us should raise our hand because we have all had trying times of one kind or another. Solomon says we are the tomato cages that serve to support one another. That's why once a month we meet on a Sunday night to bear each other's burdens by praying and encouraging one another.

Paul writes in **II Corinthians 1:3-4 "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God."**

When we gather we have the opportunity to support someone going through a hard time. If we don't gather, we don't have the opportunity for someone to support us in our time of need or for us to support

them in their need. Again, from the voice of God **“It is not good for man to be alone.”**

Second, there is companionship through spiritual gifts.

B. There Is Companionship Through Spiritual Gifts – I Corinthians 12:4-7, 12, 18

In one of the churches where I served, we did a Wednesday study on spiritual gifts. One lady repeatedly and adamantly told me she didn't have a spiritual gift. Well, she was calling God a liar because this passage says that every believer has a spiritual gift, and every spiritual gift is for the benefit of the body of Christ. If you don't gather, you aren't exercising your spiritual gift for the benefit of the body.

If you bake a cake, every ingredient is necessary for it to turn out. Leave out one thing and it just doesn't taste right and may not even look right.

Every spiritual gift, therefore, every person is important to the body of Christ to be a benefit to one another. So it matters whether or not you attend. **Do you know what your spiritual gift is?** If not, the advice I heard from a friend was jump in and start somewhere. If you think it's teaching, then offer to teach a class. If you don't find joy in teaching, then either teaching is not your spiritual gift or you're trying to teach in your own power. Remember, spiritual gifts are given by the Spirit and can only be used correctly when we rely on Him.

Using our spiritual gifts creates companionship as we connect with each other. Let me add that while there is a spiritual gift of serving, every spiritual gift is a serving gift. It benefits the body of Christ.

Third, there is companionship through spiritual growth.

C. There Is Companionship Through Spiritual Growth

Proverbs 27:17 “As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.”

Speaking of the early church in **Acts 2:42**, Luke says they devoted themselves daily to teaching and

fellowship, and communion and prayer. Our ability to grow spiritually happens to a greater degree when we gather in mutual study than by studying on our own. Companionship for the purpose of spiritual growth is one more important reason to gather with other believers.

Come out to adult impact on Sunday mornings.
Come out to men's study on the third Saturday.
Come out to Wednesday night Pathway to Power.
Attend one of the BSF classes.
Start your own Bible study.
We grow spiritually by sharpening one another.

Let me offer a fourth reason for gathering. There is companionship through service.

D. There Is Companionship Through Service

There is a term in the business world called synergy. The dictionary defines it as **“the interaction or cooperation of two or more organizations, substances, or other agents to produce a combined effect greater than the sum of their separate effects.”** Let's say I'm in my backyard raking and you're in your backyard raking. We're both doing the same work, but we aren't as productive as we would be if we combined our efforts by you coming over and helping me rake my yard and me going over and helping you rake your yard and some of you are saying that you've seen the size of my yard.

Paul exhorts us in **Galatians 5:13** to **“serve one another in love.”** In other words, serve together.

Let me end with this: our challenge to one another.

III. OUR CHALLENGE TO ONE ANOTHER – v. 25b

We are to continue spurring one another on by meeting together regularly until the Lord's return. John MacArthur writes **“We need each other. We need to be in fellowship with each other as we mutually strengthen each other and encourage each other.”** One way to do that is through our Connections Ministry, which I encourage you to be a part of. Let's gather with Christ, after all **“it's not good for man to be alone.”** We need each other.